



WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

TILL TO-MORROW

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WITH DRAWINGS BY ETHEL PENNEWILL BROWN

ONCE I found heaven, and now I must tell of it. It lay at the end of a row of ancient willow stumps out of which thin new willows had grown, like youth springing from old age, and the time was early morning. The heavens were still and blue, the air cool, and the light lay delicately clear on the green world. I swung lustily along the hard road, as if the Power that was working out in waving wheat, and flowing river, and romping dog, and all the sun and air and earth, was flashed exultantly one with me—yes, as if I could create a world myself, and light it up with a splendid sun. It was just a human being who was open to the life about him, bathing his senses and his soul in the breathless morning, drinking the vivid landscape through his eyes, and through his ears bobolink song and the silence, and

through his nostrils the smell of dewy meadows.

That was heaven enough, but I knew that more was possible—two suns might have risen in the skies, or a new race of superb men and women come singing over the hill. Then along that row of willows I swung, saw what I saw.

First, a spacious century-old barn, whose open doors, front and back, gave a framed picture of blue river in the green distance; yet no barn at all—seemingly a dining-room, with shed of kitchen from whose stovepipe curled a blue smoke, and with canvas extension with baby table and baby chairs; second, an orchard behind a little corn-field, and in the orchard little wood-and-canvas one-room structures, and here and there an army tent; and, finally, acres of meadow, bounded by

river and woods, and all dotted with other little dwellings.

That was but the setting. In the barn young girls were laying the tables, passing back and forth and singing together; out in the sun near the orchard some ten rompered children were wandering and babbling a sweet discord of natural human music; before a little dwelling a bearded Pan stood and played a haunting melody on a flute; out in the meadow a man was raking hay; a woman before a tent was dressing a baby; and from up the open road came youth, ten years to twenty, girls and boys, carrying tubs of fresh-picked corn between them. And the girls wore rubber boots, and bloomers, and white loose blouses, and they were tanned, and sparkling and supple, and the boys had on overalls and strode with the grace of young panthers.

Last, I noticed a woman lugging a heavy water-pail over the road toward the kitchen. She was dressed in khaki, bloomers and blouse, her neck was bare, and her face had the glory of blooming womanhood—a joyful strength. Her hair was almost khaki-color itself, but rifts of gold ran shining through it. She set down the pail to rest, and noticed me.

"Good-morning!" she cried.

I lounged up, nodding.

"What *is* this place?" I laughed. "Is it just human, or am I dead?"

"That's what they all ask," she said.

"But it's only a summer camp."

"For what? Everybody's working."

"Oh, a sort of open-air learn-to-work school for boys and girls—a sort of learn-to-live-together place for older folks."

"They're both hard things to learn," I murmured.

"Not in the open air," she said. "Besides, some of us pay our way by work. We've no servants here except"—she laughed—"the cook. We didn't dare trust that to amateurs."

I looked at her; I heard in the cool, caressing silence the song of the girls in the barn, the babble of children, the tramp and laughter of approaching youth, and bobolinks lispings sweet and a flute piping melodiously. Enchantment conquered me.

"Do you suppose I could pay my way?"

"Doing what?"

"Anything—I'll cook, wash dishes, kill flies, make beds, plow, pick, dig, or sing bass in yonder chorus."

Her laughter was as cool as the air.

"Come and see Mrs. Cotter," she said.

With what followed, my head swam. A little straight girl, a miniature Valkyr, came before the barn and blew thrice on a hunting-horn, and amazingly then a swarm of sparkling humanity (seventy people seem a lot in a country place) filled that barn, with the tiny children in the canvas extension. Then a thin, tall, overalled man gave thanks for the beauty and grace and health of the world and the open heart that was drenched with the divine morning, and my bearded flute-player sat down at a little portable organ, and spontaneously those men and women, that youth, and even the tiny ones, sang Emerson's

"How tenderly the haughty day
Fills her blue urn with fire."

I sang myself—for it was the glory of the morning flowing through us, a brotherhood of song.

Then joyously boys and girls waited on the table, fetching and carrying and clearing; and, gazing in the canvas extension, I saw those tots sitting like a Supreme Court with all the grave earnestness of babyhood, and sunlight splashed the oilcloth cover, the cutlery, and their little curly heads.

Mrs. Cotter was late, but gave me a few moments before the barn. She was a tiny slip of a woman with a face like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and she sized me up in a flash.

"We have only five men here—too few. We ought to have a dozen. If you'll do *everything*, we need you. Come in and have some breakfast."

Hers was the center table, and she sat at the head, opposite the tall man who had rendered thanks, and graciously she made a place for me beside her, and at once I heard such talk flow as flows all too rarely in the America I know. It was astounding in that simplicity of life. Perhaps when in Boston Longfellow and Lowell and Holmes gathered about the wine, the talk had this ripe quality—life and art and children and outdoors, glancing, flashing, delightful.

Right after breakfast the day's work started heartily. Girls and boys washed dishes, singing together while the organ played, "to give the work harmony and rhythm;" a circle of us husked corn before the barn; two young mothers prepared bottle-milk for their babies; a kindergartner led the little children off for some apple-gathering; three of the men



A SWARM OF SPARKLING HUMANITY

got out the hay-wagon from another barn up the road and hitched the horse; people scattered to their "camps" to fix beds and sweep; and a group pumped the well opposite to get their water supply.

Soon these activities were replaced by a dozen others. Girls went into the practice kitchen to bake bread; the hay-wagon down the meadow stood in the shining sun, circled by men and boys and strong girls, all digging the pitchforks into the light green mounds, swinging them over shoulder with shower of straw, and landing them lightly on the rising hay. Women washed clothes in flashing suds before the camps, and one young mother had her naked babe rolling in the sunlight while she filled a tub for the bath. Later an absorbed group of girls and women sat and lay under a big apple tree while Mrs. Cotter taught "expression;" and I, helping the husky, beautiful Swedish cook in the kitchen, came out and saw Miriam Bursley, the khaki woman, standing on a barrel-supported board and nailing up the side of a camp. She stood firm on unheeled shoes and drove the nails home unerringly, "worked like a man—only better," as Martha, the cook, told me. I beheld afterwards how she sawed a board, planed it with long strokes, used gimlet and screw-driver—a carpenter, if ever there was one. I could have watched her all morning, all the beauty of woman raised to new powers of skill and strength and suppleness. It seemed to me that here was a mate for a hardy man, here was one who would meet all life with joyful heroism—free as a man, yet woman of woman.

But that dazing glorious day swept me to other thoughts and activities—the speed was electric. A sound of hunting-horn, a trooping to lunch, a wash-up of the dishes, a silent siesta save for sleepless youth that played tennis and other sleepless youth that went berrying along unexplored roads; then a swift trooping in strange costume through a cool strip of woods and down to a little sandy beach, and the tumble and swim and laughter in the river, waters exhilaratingly icy and tide running fast. After which the day calmed into serene, clean-shadowed evening, with majestic skies pricked by sunset star, and a splendor on the glassy rippling river and a crimson light in the orchard. Human beings, softened in the silence, the light, and the unspeakable peace, drew wistfully together, tired with toil, and we had our tinkling supper, speaking and laughing tenderly.

Then in the gathering dusk, with Chinese tapers burning like fireflies in their hair, the young girls and the boys wove a folk-dance before the barn, and we others sat about and watched. And the haunting beauty of softened dancing girls and the haunting folk-sadness of the music brought the glad tears. Some of us went up in the barn-loft then—a living-room with old chairs and center-table and lamp and a piano—and Miriam Bursley played and sang old songs, with the light on her face, and we lost in soothing dark under the shadow-sketched rafters. And, watching her, I began to feel my whole existence flowing toward her.

Under the stars we emerged—and such stars! untold millions of them sowing the deep with lambent sparkles—and in the vastness and the sleep of earth swinging our lanterns farther and farther apart as each sought his rest, we called "Good-night," and brushed the dew, and went our lonesome way to tent and camp. My cot I placed at my open tent-flaps, and lay, resting in every muscle, close to the cricket-humming grass, and a moon rose, and I saw the meadow sloping in moonlight to the silvered river, and I beheld the stars. And I lay awake for sheer amazement. Cities and many countryside had I known, the joy of loving families and the joy of comrades, the comradeship of the saloon and the lodging-house, the light laughter of city streets, but never had I met anything like this—seventy people living harmoniously together in the open air. What did it mean? What was it for? Were these a picked lot of human beings? Could it last? Were we to have a new heaven, a new earth—the millennium long yearned for? And then I forgot all else, and thought of Miriam Bursley until deep sleep made me forget even her.

The absorbing days flew—rainy days, when we worked indoors, in barn and kitchen and camp; gray or sunny days, when we were out in garden, potato-field, and meadow—and soon I was a natural member of the Camp, as was every new stranger admitted.

Then I began to get my bearings. I saw that the genius of the place was the Cotters—Paul Cotter, with his mystic simplicity, his warm and fervent kinship with all things living, and Mrs. Cotter, with her gift of organization and her power to make people express themselves. She "found" people, probed

to their secret and unused aptitude, and set them to work. Several times I saw congealed city persons come up, aloof, shut-in, and quite dazed; whereupon she thawed them out, and soon they were romping, singing, toiling, with the rest of us, each with some special gift. And there were all sorts of people—the Harvard professor, the business man, college students, teachers, writers, the children of the well-to-do learning to use their hands, the society woman learning the joy of the garden and the kitchen—truly a school in democracy, with simple food, simple clothing, shared work and play, and an open-air life on the very soil of earth. And, unbelievable as it seems, yet it is a fact that I heard not once a voice raised in anger or bitterness—a blithe joy bathed all.

If ever there was a happy youngster, it was just I. Once when the garden work slid backward I seized a tub and a club, Henley his flute, Paul Cotter an American flag, and we beat the camp up and led a motley, yelling mob up the road, each armed with a noise-maker, our staid professor and old, white-haired Mrs. Warren dancing and leaping and howling with the rest. We did mighty work that day.

I became almost too healthy—my vitality craved new outlets. I would romp with tots, lead Indians on perilous trails, play baseball, teach lads wrestling, and at night, in the lonesome strip of woods, build a bonfire before a wigwam, gather boys and girls about me, and, with the wind in the shadow-lost tree-tops and the firelight on tree-bark and shining faces, I told tales of far cities and strange roads, and we nestled close to the good earth and smelled the delicious wood smoke, like memories of our ancestors a million years ago.

A youngster I, yes, and falling in love like a youngster; she was drawn, too, my woman-carpenter. We contrived to work side by side when we could, and our comradeship was natural and free, a quick understanding, a sensitiveness to each other's thought and need. Sometimes by night we launched a canoe on the moon-dappled waters, and our paddles dipped together, and the tiny ripple echoed about the bow. I told her of myself, my easy, wandering life; how I worked my way from road to street, on sea and peak; and the notion seemed to enchant her, as if she too had the wild gypsy in her and heard the call of the Unexplored. She had grown up on a Canadian farm, had then gone to

Quebec to teach school, and then had come to Boston, where Mrs. Cotter "found" her.

Her approach under the apple trees at rosy dawn threw a lasso of magic about me. She would laugh her good-morning and pace on, all grace and motion and blooming womanhood; and soon we were at the well together, she holding the pail, I turning the crank. We laughed at each other across three tables at meals, and more and more my spirit quickened with the thought that all her strong womanhood was becoming radiant with love—the bloom tinted with the flush of deepest heart-power.

One sunset-flaming evening we wandered together along the road beside the willows and I began speaking of marriage.

"That's one thing I thought of when I was little more than a boy, but not since."

Her voice throbbed in the silence.

"Why not? You'd have to give up your freedom?"

"Yes," I murmured; "I'd have to take root—vegetate."

There was a pause while we watched a chipmunk scurry along the gray stone wall.

"It would depend on the woman," she said.

"No, not that alone. It's the children; they tie a man down."

We went on, and, glancing sideways, I saw her face troubled—troubled beyond any trouble I have known.

"Yes," I went on softly, and most naturally I spoke her name; "but, Miriam, all that a man has will he give for his love!"

"She couldn't accept that much," whispered Miriam.

My heart throbbed, cutting off speech, and in a thrilling, understanding silence we went back. Every time that next day that we glanced at each other we flashed together in a glory that made us shun each other.

Then that night came the beach supper. The camp carried baskets and cans and hampers, and we built five little fires on the sand; the air was keen, a light wind blew, and in the deepening evening the little fires loosed little fragrant smokes. Then the sun went down on the right hand while the moon rose on the left, and between them the river ran glassy ripples of crimson and black and gold, and before those splendid waters dark shapes bent with spitted potatoes and ears of corn and pans of bacon over the crackling fires, and we seventy sat about hungrily busy with sandwiches and hot coffee. Then, as darkness came with a haunting reddish



MIRIAM

moonlight through the stirring trees, we drew closer, sticks were heaped on a fire till it flamed big, and four of the men stood and sang gloriously together. Miriam sat beside me; the hour was poignant and deep; my eyes blurred with tears. Was not all this too beautiful—we human beings gathered together in loving comradeship and simple joy, the days we spent working together, the bread we broke at common table, the happy play and festival together? Would all life were so! I thought. And it seemed to me that, if heaven existed, I had found it; that these people had disclosed the secret of human livableness—a life close to the earth, with tasks lightened by many hands, and serene joy enfolding all.

And I saw those health-brimming young girls, so graceful and free and laughter-smitten, and those frolicking boys, and those happy, clustering families, and the Cotters moving among all, like spirits that swept the heart. And beside me sat Miriam with liquid-shining eyes and pensive lip and droop of head, and all my soul seemed to cleave to hers, and I saw our married life going on and on with this simplicity and joy and freedom. Surely no brighter dream has been dreamed among men.

I leaned and whispered:

"Miriam."

"Yes," she murmured.

"I want to walk."

She said nothing, and rose. And we climbed the embankment and went together knee-deep through the long, cricket-singing meadow, and the ruddy moon stood at the right, sending on earth a strange light. We walked in silence. A child whimpered in some obscure camp.

"That's little Albert," whispered Miriam.

I turned.

"Miriam!" I cried.

"Oh, Thad! Thad!"

Her arms were up, and they fell about me as I drew her near; and while we kissed, the earth seemed to sway with love, and we heard the far-off singing of "Auld Lang Syne" on the shore.

"But it's too much to ask of you," she said.

"No," I whispered; "I'm merely giving up earth—I've found heaven!"

"I must go back," she said, and with a kiss, and tears, and a "Till to-morrow," she went gliding down the meadow in the moonlight, one of the loveliest visions I have seen.

"Till to-morrow!" All life lay in my

heart that moment, as light lies daily on the earth, or as the skies hold stars. But I could not sleep. I had to go out in the field and lie down, with face toward the stars and the climbing moon. And I began going back over my life, wondering how it had all led to this; remembering city streets and early first love, remembering the dear faces of other women, and as the past unrolled I was back in many scenes, now at sea, now in warm, winter-snug houses, now deep in the roaring city.

I sat up and looked about me. The river slid noiselessly, the moon was dusky, and earth dead about me; not a voice, not a light, not a creature moving. And all at once I wondered how Broadway looked at that moment. Swiftly then I saw the wild advertisements blazing on housetops, the shop-lit pavements, the dainty women, the well-dressed men stepping into motors, and I heard shout of news-boy and clang of trolley and the fierce life of the metropolis beating upon me. The slums were a riot of people, children sleeping on pavement and fire-escape and roof, the worn and wasted toilers among the stifling stones gazing vacantly on this very moon. And I thought of music-halls and young girls dancing their lives away under blazing gas while the tin piano clattered.

Restless human that I was! A fierce thirst for the terrible city came to me, and, glancing about the dead night, I knew that this Eden was but an Eden, after all. It had its fangs! It was the cloister, the retreat from the fighting common life—it gave great gifts of faith and love and health; it was worth a summer; it made human beings over. But it was not *life*! Out there was the rough world, suffering, struggling, toiling, with all its imperfections, and we, we were miles inland from that free ocean, a pool apart. And I, poor human that I was, longed for my human world again; lusted for fierce wrongs, struggle, the tumult and pangs and battles of the street; a soldier on leave smelling the battle afar off. How could I linger in this side-show while all the world went roaring by, suffering in every agony the glory of the generations?

It was not for me—no, nor marriage either. I should have known that. I should never have made Miriam feel otherwise. It was the enchantment of the place that had bewitched me. What life could I give her? What could I do? What steady labor? Thus once again I paid—paid in pangs, paid

in another's sorrow as well as my own, for my light freedom.

I rose as in a dream. I went to my tent. I gathered my clothes in a bundle, and picked up my stick. Even at its touch a strange exultation went through my remorse.

It was yet before dawn. I went out in the orchard and lay under a gnarled old tree, through whose slowly waving branches, as the wind sighed, I saw the stars go in and out, and the moon looked down like an old face.

Then a mist walked down the dim meadows, and waves of light rolled from the east, and the sudden sun rushed a rosy flush under the bending trees. And in that rosy light she came—a woman wound with dawn—summing the glory of morning; and as I rose awkwardly, stabbed through with love and grief, she saw my bundle and stick, and understood, stopping and paling. She touched a tree-trunk a moment for support, and that trouble returned to her face.

"You were waiting," she said in a low voice.

"Yes," I murmured; "walk a bit with me, Miriam."

We passed on together—our last walk—passed the barn and down the road beside the willows.

"Oh, I knew," she said.

"Miriam—I mustn't—I can't waste your life. We're old enough to understand that."

"You must be right," she whispered; "but don't pity me—at least, don't pity me! I've my work, too; and now I'd better go no farther."

I turned. We were all alone in the magical world; light falling snowy brilliant on blade and leaf, breathless with ecstasy.

"Miriam!"

"Thad! Thad!"

Her arms drew my head down; she clutched me close, whispering, "You haven't slept all night;" and we kissed long and long. For one awful moment I decided to stay as she held me.

"Good-by, good luck!" she whispered.

"Heaven bless you, and forgive me!" I said, chokingly.

I strode on; then I turned after a while. She stood upright, bravely waving to me, her eyes shining, her lips smiling. I went on and on till I came to the turn. Once again I looked. She was still waving, but I could not see her face. And I passed on, leaving heaven and returning to my human world.

